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THE USE OF COMMITTEES IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

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Occasionally I have found it advantageous to put a set of themes into the hands of a committee from the class for grading. I appoint a committee of four or five, at least three being pupils of reliable judgment. The pupils pass the themes about, each one grading the set independently and handing his grade to the chairman of the committee. The chairman hands these to me in tabulated form:

CLASS ROLL	MARKS BY					AVERAGE
	A	B	C	D	E	

Sometimes he averages the grade, puts the mark on the paper, and hands me the separate lists of grades. The pupils mark conscientiously, often putting comments down with their marks, as "incomplete," "mechanically careless," "grade cut for spelling," and so on.

I do not put these marks in my grade book until after the themes are returned and the pupils have had a chance to object, if they wish. As a rule, however, there is no complaint. If there is, I have the individual grades and comments at hand to compare with the theme. If necessary, I go over the paper myself, to satisfy the objector.

In making selection for bulletin board work or for the class paper, I have often given a committee the task of selecting the best. I have found this device quite satisfactory. It develops the critical sense of the committee, helping it later on in the criticism

of its own work; the class members are ambitious for a high rating by their classmates, and are willing to work for it.

Committee work is also of value in our English club organizations. The Friday English Club, for the purpose of oral and written compositions, is a settled institution in our high school. The program committee assigns the work, bringing the programs to me to be O.K'd before presenting them to the club. The committee is much more adept than the teacher in ferreting out talents along varied lines. We have had two almost gifted versifiers thus brought to light. The travels and interests of the individual club members are invariably brought out. One boy—apparently one of the laziest and most hopeless in school—through a committee of his chums, was discovered to be an embryo naturalist of rather unusual experience. He brought his collection of birds' eggs to school one Friday and gave a talk on the nesting habits of the birds. The club, being small, gathered around the collection, examining it and asking questions. The same boy afterward was able to give good talks on "How to Get a Collection of Moths," "My First Night in the Open," and various trapping experiences, including methods of trapping, hunting laws, and habits of the animals.

Moreover, the committee will take time, which the overworked English teacher cannot always find, to follow up these individual bents and to provide material otherwise for interesting programs. One committee made a study of the *American Magazine*, having an occasional story and the better type of articles either read or reviewed. Its judgment in choice was verified by the interest of the listeners, and by an occasional discussion which resulted. Another committee spent an hour after school poring over the records of the Michigan Historical and Pioneer Association for material for a Michigan program. One ninth-grade committee, fired by the success of a dramatic sketch put on by the previous committee and unable to find a suitable playlet, even wrote a play for its Thanksgiving program. In this club each committee was responsible for two programs, and the rivalry for originality and interest was quite intense. The club met in a room with movable chairs. One committee arranged the chairs around an imaginary table, and the program consisted of toasts at a class dinner in 1950.

Another was an Indian program. The chairs were arranged in a circle; each member of the club responded to roll call with an Indian name—the name to be his during the meeting—and the chairman was addressed throughout as Great Chief Wapello. The program consisted of Indian legends, customs, and poems.

The committees also have a way of enforcing obedience to their assignments—another relief to the teacher. One class was made up of eight 10-A boys who had conflicts with the regular English section. They called themselves the Us-Fellers Club, and were as unambitious as their ungrammatical name sounds. But their Friday Club, owing to a merciless president and a merciless program committee, was thriving. Apparently they all understood the hollowness of excuses, for an excuse was never tolerated. Our “naturalist” was assigned the topic at one time, “Reasons for My Political Beliefs.” He protested, with excuses to which even I would have listened. The other boys explained—some amusedly, and some impatiently—the great interest of present politics. When he still protested, the president dismissed the matter by saying, “Get your father to tell you something, then. You’ve got to vote in a few years, and you might as well begin to learn about politics now!” The speech was made.

There are, of course, dangers to be guarded against. All committees are not equally reliable. In the case of a weak committee, strict supervision and some suggestion by the teacher is necessary. The opinions of the committee and the teacher as to what would be fitting do not always correspond, and one is confronted with the problem of educating the class without dictating to them in regard to a maturer standard.

The committee device, if not always in the beginning a time saver for the teacher, is at least an education to the pupils; it creates a social atmosphere of co-operation between pupil and teacher; and as it is tried out more fully, it becomes, indeed, a real help to the teacher.